

2015-16 Illinois Fur Harvest Survey

Wildlife Diversity Program Note #16-3

The Fur Harvest Survey provides estimates of (1) numbers of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, (2) values of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers, and (3) distribution of the harvest among resource users. This project is supported in part by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program (Project W-99-R, Study X).

METHODS

State law requires licensed fur buyers to maintain records and submit reports of all raw furs purchased. We mailed report forms and written instructions to licensed buyers about 10 days before the opening of the muskrat trapping season. Buyers who failed to report by the deadline were sent up to 2 reminders by first class mail and another by certified letter.

Buyers provided estimates of (1) raw fur purchases from Illinois hunters and trappers, (2) average pelt prices for all sizes and grades, and (3) percentages of pelts taken by fur hunters. We corrected estimates for non-response and out-of-state pelt sales. Trappers who captured a river otter were required to purchase an Otter Registration Permit within 48 hours; sales of pelts were based on sales of permits to trappers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Department issued 123 permits to fur buyers during 2015-16. Based on a 96% response rate, the total number of pelts sold by Illinois furtakers was 70,152, a decrease of 57% from 2014-15 (Table 1). Total value of pelts sold by furtakers decreased 67% to \$365,378.80. Raccoon and muskrat accounted for 77% of the total harvest and 46% of its value.

Fur buyers' estimates of the proportion of pelts taken by hunters varied from 2% for striped skunk to 43% for gray fox; they were intermediate for opossum (13%), red fox (18%) and coyote (23%). Hunters accounted for a similar proportion of the raccoon harvest in 2015-16 (46%) as 2014-15 (47%).

Today, pelt values are driven mainly by demand from foreign markets such as Russia and China. Economic conditions, monetary exchange rates, political events and severity of winters in overseas countries shape fur markets in North America and contribute to their volatility. Demand for wild furs was poor during 2015-16 because of economic conditions in major markets and a glut of wild and ranch-raised goods from past seasons. Coyote, used mostly for trim, was a bright spot compared to other species. The number of raccoon pelts sold during 2015-16 was the lowest since the Department started keeping records in 1975-76.

Sales of trapping licenses declined from 8,369 in 2014-15 to 6,523 in 2015-16. During 2014-15, approximately 7,600 raccoon hunters spent 73,000 days afield and 28,900 coyote hunters spent 270,000 days afield (Williams et al. 2015).

Sales of coyote pelts during 2015-16 were greater than the long-term average (since 1975-76; 134%). Sales fell short of historic averages for striped skunk (97%), beaver (65%), river otter (72%), badger (53%), raccoon (21%), opossum (6%), muskrat (13%), mink (10%), weasel (5%), red fox (14%) and gray fox (<1%).

LITERATURE CITED

Campbell, L.K., B.D. Williams, and C.A. Miller. 2015. 2014-2015 Illinois trapper report: harvest, effort, and marketing practices. Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, Illinois, USA.

Williams, B.D., J.M. Crain, L.K. Campbell, L.A. Schweizer, and C.A. Miller. 2015. 2014-2015 Illinois hunter harvest report. Illinois Natural History Survey Technical Report 2015 (49). Illinois Natural History Survey, Champaign, Illinois, USA.

Table 1. Comparative fur harvest data for Illinois, 2014-15 vs. 2015-16.

Species	Number of pelts sold ^a		Change in sales from 2014-15 ^b	Average price per pelt (dollars)		Total value to fur-takers (dollars)		Change in value from 2014-15 (dollars)
	2014-15	2015-16		2014-15	2015-16	2014-15	2015-16	
Muskrat	28,453	17,400	-11,053 (-38.8)	4.95	2.40	140,842.35	41,760.00	-99,082.35 (-70.3)
Mink	1,349	769	-580 (-43.0)	7.75	3.95	10,454.75	3,037.55	-7,417.20 (-70.9)
Raccoon	111,011	36,834	-74,177 (-66.8)	5.95	3.40	660,515.45	125,235.60	-535,279.85 (-81.0)
Opossum	1,963	962	-1,001 (-51.0)	1.20	0.90	2,355.60	865.80	-1,489.80 (-63.2)
Red fox	1,136	597	-539 (-47.4)	17.35	10.20	19,709.60	6,089.40	-13,620.20 (-69.1)
Gray fox	29	11	-18 (-62.1)	14.55	10.45	421.95	114.95	-307.00 (-72.8)
Beaver	6,137	3,146	-2,991 (-48.7)	8.95	6.90	54,926.15	21,707.40	-33,218.75 (-60.5)
River otter	1,136 ^c	980 ^c	-156 (-13.7)	29.00	18.15	32,944.00	17,787.00	-15,157.00 (-46.0)
Striped skunk	843	537	-306 (-36.3)	2.85	3.50	2,402.55	1,879.50	-523.05 (-21.8)
Weasel	8	2	-6 (-75.0)	0.25	1.50	2.00	3.00	+1.00 (+50.0)
Coyote	11,062	8,898	-2,164 (-19.6)	17.85	16.50	197,456.70	146,817.00	-50,639.70 (-25.6)
Badger	32	16	-16 (-50.0)	9.95	5.10	318.40	81.60	-236.80 (-74.4)
Total/mean	163,159	70,152	-93,007 (-57.0)	6.90	5.20	1,122,349.50	365,378.80	-756,970.70 (-67.4)

^aIncludes correction for non-response and allowances for out-of-state pelt sales as estimated by Campbell et al. (2015).

^bNumbers in parentheses indicate percent change between years.

^cBased on sales of Otter Registration Permits.